

Pilot Project Profile: Brattleboro Union High School

In December 2002, a Community Task Force on Truancy and Drop Out Prevention formed in partnership with Brattleboro Union High School to impact the numbers of students who complete their education successfully. The membership consists of school administrators, school board members, community service providers and youth. Youth representation came from the BUHS alternative programs, especially the Cotton Mill Hill campus. The task force is sponsored by the Alliance for Building Community (ABC), the area's regional partnership.

The task force identified conditions that were contributing to truancy and dropouts at BUHS:

- **On the school environment front:** Students do not feel valued and respected by adults and peers in school. This included perceived labeling of students by school personnel, policies and practices that target students at risk in negative ways, harassment by peers and lack of connection with adults at school.
- **On the academic front:** Lack of appreciation of different learning styles in the school's curriculum.
- **On the basic needs front:** Students' personal and social needs interfere with learning, particularly mental health issues and homelessness.

In looking at these concerns, the task force identified three pathways in their Theory of Change: 1) school curriculum design and instructional practice; 2) school environment, which includes school climate, school safety, and access to non-educational services; and 3) basic needs: housing, clothing, food.

Here are some highlights of task force sponsored programs and activities that relate to components of a comprehensive strategy to impact these three pathways:

- **Education curriculum:** A coordinator has been hired to develop community based learning opportunities for students with a record of truancy, suspension, expulsion, multiple disciplinary referrals, and/or multiple course failures. In the next year, the CBL program will hire a school based mentor to work with the at risk students, develop a data collection system for our student population, begin examining ways to better understand why students in our community are leaving school to help us interpret our data, and work to ensure that students are accessing a wide range of school and community based resources to increase engagement in school.
- **Collaboration:** A community team made up of officials, service providers and youth has taken on the harassment concerns. In June 2003, they took a weeklong retreat to increase their awareness of how to impact incidences of harassment, violence and racial tensions among youth in our community.
- **Services:** The United Way of Windham County and ABC jointly promote the Windham County Youth Initiative, a cross-community effort to expand youth development. The Youth Initiative has identified affordable housing to youth as a priority concern.
- **Policy and Enforcement:** Discussions have begun with the elementary schools about how to address truancy at the elementary level.